



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SHALL THE LONG COLLEGE VACATION BE ABOLISHED?

BY ELMER ELLSWORTH BROWN
CHANCELLOR, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

PERHAPS none of us in our college days understood the purpose—if there was a purpose—in the long vacation, the general abolition of which American educators are now considering seriously. Students merely followed the habit of students in this play time, which then began, as it still begins in many educational institutions, in the latter half of June and continued until the last week in September, accustoming themselves to a life wholly different from that spent in the college term.

It is not on record, I believe, that students have protested against the long vacation with any marked degree of vehemence. The beneficiaries have merely accepted it as a mysterious dispensation, which they have received with due gratitude.

One of the earlier conditions affecting the college year in this country was the general disposition to relax every other general activity in the Summer and early Fall months so that labor could be concentrated on the cultivation and harvesting of the crops. When cities and towns were small and our population was overwhelmingly agricultural, when man-power was often inadequate for gathering the abundant yields of a soil of almost virgin richness, the sons of farmers and planters were urgently needed at home in summer. Even the wealthiest did their share in the work upon which the success of large farming operations largely depended.

Those elemental conditions of America-in-the-making are gone, and with them is gone much of the argument which then might have been held to justify the long college vacation. The sons of farmers form a much smaller proportion of our student population than they once did. In

increasing numbers the sons of the poor from the industrial masses of the cities are crowding to the halls of education, especially since the colleges have added technical instruction, business preparation, and many other forms of direct training for daily remunerative work to the old standard courses.

There is another large and doubtless growing class in all of our older colleges. This is the class of rich or well-to-do youth, city-bred, who accept college life as a social tradition, and welcome the long vacation for recreational and social purposes. This class has been moved to a deeper seriousness by the war. A great proportion of them enlisted as soon as possible after war was declared. They have met its danger, discipline, and privation in the finest spirit. And they will not readily go back to a life of leisurely triviality.

The war has indeed opened the way for a general decision on the abolition of the long vacation; it has practically forced this question upon us with a demand for a "yes" or "no." It has produced a chain of developments which began with the acceptance by a number of engineering schools—the School of Applied Science of New York University was the first of the number—of contracts with the War Department to give a course of two months of intensive training to the so-called vocational army student. These men, selected from those summoned in the first draft, received instruction in the details of technical army service, such as radio work, concrete construction, and the use of machinery, so that at the end of the required period of preparation they were able to do specialized tasks involved in military operations. At the close of the first two months, a new group was sent to us by the War Department, and thus we came to possess a unit of students whose cycle kept part of the university organization going forward on the basis of a year divided into short terms of swift and vigorous training without intervening vacations.

There followed the establishment of the Students' Army Training Corps, which caused a number of institutions to change definitely to a twelve-months' schedule for the college year. The students of this corps, being regularly enlisted in the army, could no more take vacations than their brethren fighting in France, whom they hoped soon to join.

The signing of the armistice only a little more than two months after the Students' Army Training Corps was instituted in the universities and colleges, and the subsequent disbanding of this corps, forced us to establish a status for the large number of young men released from national service who wished to return to their studies on January 1st. At New York University we adjusted this situation by allowing credits for studies pursued by the members of the corps while it was in existence, and also by extending the period of instruction in the present university year to September 1, in order that students entering on January 1 might complete the work of their classes for the session and enter the next higher classes at the beginning of the session of 1919-1920.

Thus we are actually on a temporary twelve-months' basis by force of circumstances; and a committee of our faculty is considering the question whether we shall continue on that basis for an indefinite period.

What are the considerations that move American educators to contemplate the possibility of dispensing permanently with the long vacation, as a few institutions in the West have already done?

One of these, which is admitted by all to be of high importance, is the fact that under the proposed arrangement the great plants of our leading educational institutions will be fully utilized for the benefit of the public. These plants represent an expenditure of millions of dollars by the principal American institutions of higher education. They include buildings amply equipped with apparatus for scientific work and study and immense libraries, as well as large bodies of men trained for instruction.

The war has caused us to realize more vividly the value of these things in public service, although there was by no means any lack of endeavor to use them for such service before the war. We have, however, come to understand better the place in the structure of our nation which universities and colleges occupy as direct adjuncts of the Government.

Hitherto, in most of our educational institutions these plants have been idle approximately one-fourth or one-third of each year. There is the same reason for making continuous use of them as is urged for the use of public school buildings at night and during the vacation season,

for the benefit of the communities in which they exist and from which they draw their support. A trace of the sense of this necessity has been shown in past years in the increasing development of summer schools at the universities, in which teachers and others who are not able to attend the regular sessions have found a means of adding to their educational equipment.

An argument tending in the same direction is that where students are enabled to compress their university work into a shorter period, there will not be so much delay to many of them in beginning their life occupations. The preparation now required of a professional man rarely enables him to start the real work of his profession below the age of twenty-five years, if his educational equipment is at all thorough. After his four years in college he must spend three or four years in the professional school, if he goes to one of the schools having the highest requirements, and the tendency is to lengthen this last-named period.

By means of the four-term college year, each term consisting of three months, it will be possible to graduate students in three years instead of four, with precisely the same degree of thoroughness in preparation, provided they can stand the strain of continuous study. This saving of time is a vital concern to young men of scanty means, who wish to prepare themselves for scientific and professional careers. Students of this class are now attending our universities in great numbers and would welcome the opportunity of gaining the full number of months of preparation within a less number of years. For them, university life is a period of intense work, on which they are concentrating all of their resources and energies, and they cannot afford long, vacant periods in which time goes forward while their course of training is at a stand-still.

It is further urged in behalf of the four-term university year that students will do better work if their studies are not interrupted for long periods in the summer, when they forget a good part of what they have learned during the previous eight or nine months. There is no doubt that students "get rusty" during each long vacation and return to college in that condition.

Objection to the four-term session is based to a great extent upon the belief that intellectual processes cannot be forced. It is asserted that students whose application is

almost continuous will lose the mental elasticity which is vital if a maximum benefit is to be derived from their training. They may go "stale," like over-trained athletes.

The same argument applies to the professors. If almost their entire time is spent in the strenuous duties of oversight and instruction of students, they will not have the intervals for research of which they customarily make such excellent use. It is supposed, too, that just as during the summer term the interest of the student body will fall below normal, there will perhaps be a similar decline in the interest of their instructors.

A third point is a question of administration. It might be difficult to adjust the extensive and complex organization of one of our greater universities to the conditions of a summer term, and a considerable increase of expense would be involved.

At the same time it should be understood that the work of universities and colleges under the four-term session will be by no means lacking in opportunities for rest and recreation. It is planned that, at the end of each term of twelve weeks, the thirteenth week shall be an interlude of rest. This would amount to a total of four weeks' rest in the course of the year, besides the incidental holidays at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. The mature young men who form the bulk of our university and college student body might be found to be amply satisfied with this arrangement.

Whatever may be the general decision of our universities and colleges as to putting this programme, or something like it, definitely into operation, I believe that American educators generally have received a stimulus from war conditions which will result in a more thrifty and less wasteful use of these great establishments for the instruction of youth. They have been developed by the public and private liberality of our people, and they are to be made to yield a larger return in public service.

ELMER ELLSWORTH BROWN.